

SYMPATHY

WITH

THE AFFLICTED CHRISTIAN.

"Blessed is the man whom Thou chasteneth."

Suffering Christian, enduring Christian, upon whom the strokes of your Heavenly Father's chastening rod are falling fast and heavily, turn aside with me for a moment, from the desponding contemplation of your sorrows. Permit one who has suffered, to enjoy the great privilege of speaking to you a word of comfort. Perhaps you have often heard words of sympathy and comfort. You have found them in the promises of God's holy Word, and yet have feared they were not designed for you, and have not been able to appropriate them as adapted to your necessity. The language of your burdened soul is, "Was ever sorrow like *my* sorrow?"

Perhaps you are a stranger to the voice of the comforter. To your afflictions, it may be, is added this heaviest of all, to bear them *alone*; and in silence and pain to nurse the soul-sickness, that is slowly drying up the fountain of life. Suffer me then, not to *point* you to the true consolation, but to *accompany* you thither, and once more let us try to drink from that gushing spring in whose waters is life.

In the search after happiness, which is the natural pursuit of every heart, you have met with painful disappointments.

2 SYMPATHY WITH THE AFFLICTED CHRISTIAN.

Be not overwhelmed, but calmly consider whether you have been truly wise in your estimate of happiness, and in the means to be used for its attainment. You have probably looked for enjoyment from this world; from the possession of its treasures of love, honor, pleasure, or wealth. Alas! it is too much the case with all. We either fail to obtain possession of these earthly treasures, or obtain them only to have our hearts torn by their removal. The dearest object of our love; the best beloved, who has been our light and joy, is torn from our embrace. The world ceases to be a bright, happiness-giving world to us. Gloom and darkness cast a deep shadow over our prospect. Then we groan under a cross, whose weight every day increases, until we feel that it is too heavy to be borne, and, in our unbelief, question the goodness of the Father who thus afflicts, even that Father who loves us more tenderly than does the mother her infant nursling. By the "sorrow that drinks up our spirit," He would teach us, in the fullness of His love, the true object of our being! That this object is not to have our own will, in the possession of what we esteem best, but renouncing self, to glorify Him in doing His will, may be a hard lesson for the natural heart to learn, but oh! how indispensably necessary that it should be learned, as lying at the foundation of true holiness, and happiness, and as conducing to that deep submission which yields up everything at God's command, to receive afterwards, in his time, an hundred-fold reward; to be made partaker of a love of which the dearest earthly affections are only the faint types; to receive in place of a pining, yearning emptiness of spirit, long, soul-satisfying draughts from the infinite fulness.

Dear fellow-pilgrim to Zion, wearied and faint under your trials, have you fully submitted to your Father's will? Do so, I beseech you. In no dark corner of your heart let a rebellious feeling find refuge. Submit to Him, and trust in Him. Although your way may be through the deep waters, and you can neither hear His voice, nor see His face, He is still with you. The arm of His power encircles your fainting form, and of His dear presence you shall perhaps be made aware when you least expect it. Above the roar of the swelling waves you will hear Him say, with inexpressible love, "Be of good cheer, it is I, be not afraid." Ah! then you will have joy. Then will light arise in the darkness, and

you will bless God that He took away your earthly love, to give you the infinitely richer portion of a heavenly one. Does this seem impossible? Trust and believe. "All things are possible to him that believeth."

But you say, "My soul is dark and sorrowful; I know not how to trust and believe. In my affliction I see not the hand of a merciful Father, but that of an offended Judge, from whose anger I shrink." Be not discouraged. If you cannot believingly trust, at least pray for a spirit of submission to him as a justly offended Judge; pray for a true sense of that sin which separates from God, divests Him of His true character, and presents Him only as an angry Judge. For be assured, that this exclusive view of God is the result of our own hardness of heart and rebellious temper. He is in truth a God in Christ, reconciling the world, not imputing their sins to them.

We should pray without ceasing for true penitence; for all right emotions towards our best and truest Friend, who counted not His own life too dear to be laid down as a sacrifice for us. Who, even now, while we writhe and groan in anguish of soul, and believe him to be far off, is sitting at our side, as a "refiner and purifier of silver," watching with untiring vigilance the process of our purification. While the fiery waves roll and toss themselves in that, seven-times heated furnace," he never takes his eye off, but waits, with an interest even greater than our own, for that happy moment when the pure silver, released from its dross, shall give back the image of Him who watches it so intently. Truly He is grieved when His children suffer, but He knows that without chastisement they can never be made partakers of His holiness, or occupants of those heavenly mansions He has gone before to prepare.

Dear fellow-pilgrim, would you not choose to be made meet for such an inheritance, even at the expense of much trial and suffering here? Ah, yes! You already begin to believe that the sufferings of this present life are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. You are already becoming willing to suffer, as you must, in the destruction of your carnal nature, in the renunciation of your own will and wishes. Look beyond the narrow circle of sorrow and disappointment, in which your thoughts constantly revolve. Turn your eyes resolutely towards the

4 SYMPATHY WITH THE AFFLICTED CHRISTIAN.

land on the other side of Jordan, and although all may now look impenetrably dark in that direction—still look. Soon there will be flashes of light through the gloom. Soon, if you gaze perseveringly, these flashes will become a steady brightness, and this world, with all its joys and sorrows, will be swallowed up in the all-glorious future to which we hasten.

Consider, above all, that the great "Captain of our Salvation was made perfect through suffering." If suffering was a necessary means of his perfection, who was without sin, what must be the necessity for it in our case! The apostle of the Gentiles, in describing the point he most ardently wished to reach, says, "That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and *the fellowship of his sufferings*, being made conformably unto his death. As if he had said, "As Christ suffered the *punishment* of my sin, so must I suffer in its *destruction*, and dying unto sin, be raised to spiritual life by that same power that brought our Lord Jesus Christ again from the dead."

Christian, will you shrink from such a fellowship? No, rather bearing the cross with Him, let us rejoice that we are counted worthy of such companionship, knowing that "if we suffer with Him, we shall also reign with Him." Let us not fear to follow him. Whenever, as I pass along this vale of tears, I can perceive any traces of His footsteps, then I know that I am in the right way. No matter how "waste and howling the wilderness" may be about me, or how dark and stormy the sky above, if I can discern any evidence that He whose footsteps I follow has passed that way, I press forward with renewed courage and faith. Although the road leads towards the dark valley and shadow of death, and the rush of the swift waters of the river of death, already comes faintly to my ear—still onward—onward! No darkness can be so deep as to hide the print of his foot. Where he has once been my soul is safe. The light of His promise, "I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am there ye may be also," shines above the gloom like a dazzling star. Its rays, now reflecting the light of the golden city, now illuminating the dark waters of the river of death, make its dreaded passage but a pathway of light to the presence of God.

Abandoning, then, all hope of comfort from earthly sources, let us come in meekness to the help our Father has pro-

vided for his suffering children. Let us come to prayerful study of his Word; to the throne of grace; to the great atoning sacrifice. Let us give our hearts wholly to the teachings of the Great Master, and dread not so much the burden of our affliction, as the danger that it may not accomplish the end for which it was designed. We may well fear that from His chastenings we may not draw all the precious lessons they were intended to teach; that we may not learn from them the true object and end of our being, even to glorify God by a daily, child-like obedience, trusting our salvation wholly in his hands, who has promised "never to leave nor forsake us." To be happy is not so much the object of life as to be holy, although we know none are so truly happy as those who most diligently strive to please God, by becoming assimilated to his likeness. As our divine Lord has said, "Whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall find it," let us cast all our cares and sorrows upon Him, and be willing to endure whatever He, in His infinite love and wisdom, shall see necessary for us, feeling assured He will not suffer us to experience one pang that is not requisite for our sanctification.

Thus leaning upon the arm of the Beloved, it will no longer seem so hard to wait patiently, if not hopefully, for the time when He shall give us "beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness;" when He shall make that which is now so dark and sorrowful light, and even joyful, and we shall be able to believe that "Earth has *no* sorrow which Heaven cannot cure."

"Subdued and instructed, at length to Thy will,
My hopes and my longings, I fain would resign.
Oh give me a heart that can wait and be still,
Nor know of a wish nor a pleasure but Thine.

"There are mansions exempted from sin and from woe,
But they stand in a region by mortals untrod;
There are rivers of joy, but they roll not below;
There is rest, but it dwells in the presence of God."

PATIENCE IN TRIALS.

“Patience in tribulation.”—Rom. xii:12.

The Church grows by tears, and withers by smiles; God’s vine thrives the better for pruning. Queen Elizabeth is reported to have said, “The skill of a pilot is best known in a storm, the valor of a soldier in a field of battle, and the worth of a Christian in the time of trial.” Let us view—

The nature of the Christian’s trials. “Tribulation is often spoken of as his lot in this world; and it is of two descriptions :

Common.—Man is said to be “born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward.” The world is a wilderness of thorns and briars, and not a garden of beautiful flowers.

Peculiar.—I mean trials peculiar to, and inseparable from, the Christian life. It is an easy thing to go with the stream of sinful custom and fashion, but to sail against it exposes us to continual opposition.

The manner in which they are to be borne. We must be “patient in tribulation.”

How is this patience to exercised? So as to bear our trials without murmuring; so as not to despair of deliverance; to remember from whom they come, and for what they are designed; and that this has been the common lot of Christ’s followers in every age.

What are its advantages? The discovery of sin; the improvement of grace; the manifestation of our sonship; deliverance from the world’s condemnation; and preparation for eternal glory. Thus God gives grace in the day of conversion, and tries it in the period of affliction. We are chastened of the Lord that we should not be condemned with the world. By this God separates the sin that he hates from the soul that he loves.

H Y M N .

Almighty Lord, before Thy throne
Thy mourning people bend ;
'Tis on Thy pardoning grace alone,
Our prostrate hopes depend.

Dark judgments, from Thy heavy hand
Thy dreadful power display ;
Yet mercy spares our guilty land,
And still we live to pray.

How changed, alas ! are truths divine,
For error, guilt, and shame ;
What impious numbers, bold in sin,
Disgrace the Christian name.

O, turn us, turn us, mighty Lord,
Convert us by that grace ;
Then shall our hearts obey Thy word,
And see again Thy face.

Then, should oppressing foes invade,
We will not sink in fear ;
Secure of all-sufficient aid,
When God, our God, is near.

